Social Media Use and Adolescent Self-Esteem: A Longitudinal Examination

Developmental Psychology & Sociology

Difficulty	Intermediate	**Recommended Length**	10,000 – 12,000 words
Keywords	social media, self-esteem, adolescents, social comparison, Instagram, TikTok, mental health	**Academic Support**	AssignProSolution.com

Introduction

The relationship between social media and adolescent wellbeing has been debated intensely since around 2017, but the evidence is more complicated than most popular accounts suggest. This dissertation examines what the longitudinal research actually shows about the direction and magnitude of the relationship between social media use and self-esteem in teenagers — and why the findings are so inconsistent across studies.

Background and Context

Jonathan Haidt's work and the broader 'phone-based childhood' thesis have made this one of the most publicly contested areas in developmental psychology. But the academic literature does not tell a clean story. Effect sizes in most studies are small. Platform matters — passive scrolling has different effects than active posting. Age, gender, pre-existing mental health, and the type of content consumed all moderate the relationship. A good dissertation in this area does not simply repeat the popular narrative; it engages seriously with the methodological debates in the research.

Key Research Questions

1. What does the longitudinal evidence show about the causal relationship between social media use and adolescent self-esteem?
2. Does the effect differ by platform type, usage pattern (passive vs. active), or demographic group?
3. How does social comparison theory explain the mechanisms through which social media affects self-evaluation?
4. What are the methodological limitations of existing studies and how do they affect our conclusions?

Suggested Methodology

A systematic literature review of longitudinal studies published between 2015 and 2024 is the most appropriate approach for an undergraduate or Master's dissertation. The review should apply clear

inclusion criteria, assess study quality using a recognised framework (GRADE or CASP), and synthesise findings thematically. Primary data collection using an experience sampling method (ESM) diary study adds original contribution if institutional ethics approval is feasible.

Key Theoretical Frameworks

- Social Comparison Theory — Festinger (1954)
- Objectification Theory — Fredrickson & Roberts (1997)
- Self-Discrepancy Theory — Higgins (1987)
- Uses and Gratifications Theory — Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch (1973)

Common Challenges and How to Address Them

The main challenge is the speed at which platforms change — a study examining Instagram in 2018 may not generalise to TikTok in 2024. Platform affordances shape behaviour, and the literature has not kept pace with platform evolution. The dissertation should acknowledge this explicitly and be cautious about generalising findings across platforms or time periods.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This is a topic where the popular narrative and the empirical evidence diverge enough to write something genuinely interesting. The best dissertations take a clear analytical position — not just 'it's complicated' but a specific, evidenced argument about what we can and cannot conclude from the available data. For dissertation planning and writing support, visit **AssignProSolution.com**.

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